

Here are ten of most frequently ignored (or unknown) grammar rules and writing practices:

1. **Commas:** except for the period, the comma is the most common punctuation mark and the most misused. It's a tricky one because the rules are scarce, leaving usage up to style guides and writers' best judgement. In weak writing, there are too few or too many commas. Be consistent in how you use commas and strike the right balance.
2. **Avoid weak words:** *very*, *really*, and the verbs *to be*, *to have*, and *to do* are often markers of weak, amateur writing. Sometimes, we need to use these words, but there is often a more specific or vivid word available.
3. **Verb and tense agreement:** these errors are often the result of shoddy editing and proofreading. A sentence that was originally in perfect past tense is changed to simple past tense but one of the words in the sentence is overlooked and you end up with something like *She went the store and had shopped for produce.* Another example would be *The cats has one bowl.*
4. **Stay away from passive voice:** avoid passive constructions like *The book was read by the girl.* Passive voice is awkward, renders unnecessary verbiage, and sounds old-fashioned. Active voice is better: *The girl read the book.*
5. **Check your homophones:** homophones are little devils because spell check won't catch them and they often sneak past editor's eyes. Too many youngsters aren't taught proper homophone use (in other words, they don't know spellings or definitions of their vocabulary). From common sets of homophones like *they're, their, and there* to more advanced words like *complement and compliment*, it pays to learn proper usage and to proofread meticulously.
6. **Rare or uncommon punctuation marks:** if you decide to use a punctuation mark like the ellipsis (three dots) or semicolon (comma with a period over it), then take the time to learn what it's called and how to use it properly.
7. **Watch your pronouns:** too many pronouns in a sentence cause confusion and makes it difficult for the reader to keep track of who is saying and doing what. Use the noun or name first in a paragraph, then use pronouns to refer back to whomever (or whatever) you're talking about.
8. **Only proper nouns are capitalized:** for some reason, a lot of people have taken it upon themselves to freely capitalize any words they think are important, a practice that is rampant in business writing. *The Product is on Sale Now* is not a grammatically correct sentence.
9. **Extraneous words (verbiage):** *verbiage* is not text or writing; it is extraneous, unnecessary language. The best sentences and paragraphs contain only words that are absolutely necessary. They communicate as simply and straightforwardly as possible. Keep it simple and edit the excess!
10. **Consistency is key:** the grammar rules don't cover everything. As a writer, you will

constantly be challenged to make judicious decisions about how to construct your sentences and paragraphs. Always be consistent. Keeping a style guide handy will be a tremendous help.